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Monday, May 07, 2007

Combine tipping with aggregators

TipIt proposes to include a content aggregation feature showing the best-tipped pieces of content, since a tip is more credible than your typical content vote on an aggregator like digg or reddit. This suggests to me an even bigger idea: to provide similar incentives for Internet tipping as we have for tipping at a dinner out -- to make it an expected social practice -- combine tipping with content aggregators like reddit or digg or socializing services like facebook with features as described below.

With content we don't know how much it's worth until we've already consumed it (a classic measurement problem). A tip would solve this problem, but a tip is a social thing and requires more than just a payment.

If I were doing TipIt I'd change the design in four ways. First, I'd add generosity signal features that inform one's friends or fellow tippers as well as the tipee about the tip. This could be in the form of aggregator "karma" points that name and ranks the most generous tippers. This would be like the "karma" points which people who add content to a social aggregator compete for, but it signals far more -- it signals that one is a generous tipper as well as a generous contributor of reccomendations. There are a variety of other ways (home or facebook pages, e-mail, etc.) that generosity signals might similarly be sent within a social circle.

Secondly, I'd add it to an existing aggregator rather than starting a whole new service from scratch.

Third, I'd add some extra security (cryptography, natch :-)

Fourth, I wouldn't try to aggregate "microtips." I think these will have the same kinds of problems that micropayments have. Instead, I'd make the tips nice round numbers in increments of 50 cents or a dollar. That makes it simple for people to keep track of their own tips and their friend's tips.

So here's how it might work:

Your client software (perhaps just a web page script) pays the tip (using an already existing system like PayPal) to the content provider, perhaps via the aggregator, and publishes a cryptographic proof that you made the tip. The aggregator verifies the proof (if it's not the payment intermediary it does this by cross-checking with the tipee), registers the vote, and shows that you made the tip. This signals to others both that the content is appreciated, that you are a generous tipper (thus transporting the social incentive to tip from dining out to the Internet), that you have good taste, and that you put your money where your digg vote is.

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Nick Szabo

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Optionally, it could publish a bit of HTML code on the tipper's own blog or home page, that links to the aggregator and shows how much a person has tipped. It could send out e-mails to the tipper's friends recommending the content and, along the way, informing the friends of the generosity of the tip.

If content tipping on the Internet will work at all -- and given the measurement problem of content it would be very nice if it would work - I think it's much more likely to work well if done in a social fashion like this.

Posted by Nick Szabo at 9:45 PM

4 comments:

Iang said...

I'm somewhat skeptical! The problem with **public** tipping is that it then becomes more of a signal of who you are than what the individual tip is. The information from the recommendation is then weakened or lost.

A lot depends on what the objective is. If it is to make money, then we have to find a way to reward the person for parting with funds. For example, if you charge for voting, it has been shown that some people will simply do this: pay to vote certain content upwards.

Alternatively, if the objective is to share opinions, it seems that real commentary is what is needed. Although it is possible to employ people to "pad" comments out (a trick used by political parties) this is quite often detectable, and carries a huge penalty.

1:47 AM

Reinier Zwitserloot said...

Reinier from tipit.to here:

We'll be launching a screencast soon with a walk through the features.

One of them is widgets - you have widgets showing people tipping your site, and widgets showing you tipping other sites. Not at launch, but at a later date, we'll launch a friend system: you give us your friend's account names, and we'll give you an RSS feed of all the tips your friends are making.

On the security issue: We'll obviously be using https, and any tipjar named after a domain (anything with at least one dot in it) will need site ownership confirmation before we let you claim it. Not sure if that's what you had in mind, but, for now, seems like that should cover the obvious bases.

7:02 AM

nick said...

Ian, I think people will sometimes look to the content ratings (as they do now on digg), and people will sometimes look to the "who one is" signal (as they do now at a restaraunt). It depends on the context. The reward for parting with the funds is the "who one is" reputation as well as any of the other social motivations people have to tip.

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I'm guessing from your comments, though, that you are skeptical of digg and the like too?

Reiner, I love your project and it's great to hear about the friends feature. My best of wishes to your endeavor.

8:58 AM

Jeremiah said...

It sounds very similar to "Buying a beer" if you like the article on BlogClout (www.blogclout.com/blog). If you like the article you can donate some funds (Buy a beer) or if you REALLY liked it, you can donate even more (Buy a pitcher).

The concept is good and worthwhile, only if the implementation is solid, but more importantly fast and easy.

4:29 PM

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